



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

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FB12-077

NOAA Fisheries Seeks Public Comment on a Proposed Rule for Shallow-water Grouper in the Gulf of Mexico *Comment period ends November 19, 2012*

NOAA Fisheries is seeking public comment on a proposed rule for the Gulf of Mexico reef fish fishery. The rule would modify accountability measures for shallow-water grouper and change the framework procedure for the reef fish fishery management plan. Accountability measures help keep landings within the catch limits or catch targets, or make adjustments if those levels are exceeded. The framework is a procedure that allows faster development of routine changes to regulations. The proposed rule published in the *Federal Register* on October 19, 2012.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and NOAA Fisheries developed Amendment 38 to the fishery management plan which addressed the following issues:

- Currently, if recreational landings exceed the catch limit for gag or red grouper in a year, the recreational season for all shallow-water groupers will be shortened the following year. This rule would modify the accountability measure to shorten the season only for the stock which exceeded the catch limit, avoiding unnecessary closures for other shallow-water grouper.
- The current method for triggering accountability measures uses a three-year moving average of recreational catches compared to the annual catch limit. However, the use of a moving average has not been practical due to frequent changes in the gag annual catch limit. This rule would change the trigger method to one that compares one year of landings to the annual catch limit.
- Currently, a change to accountability measures requires an amendment to the fishery management plan. This rule would allow changes to accountability measures through the framework procedure, which should result in faster implementation of these measures.

For more information on Amendment 38 please refer to the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on the NOAA Fisheries Service Web site.

Request for Comments

NOAA Fisheries must receive comments on this proposed rule no later than November 19, 2012. We will address all comments specifically directed to the amendment or the proposed rule in the final rule. You may obtain electronic copies of the proposed rule and the amendment from the NOAA Fisheries Web site:

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/GrouperSnapperandReefFish.htm>
or the e-Rulemaking Portal: www.regulation.gov.

How to Submit Comments

You may submit comments by either of the following methods. Comments received through other means may not be considered.

Electronic Submissions: Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:

www.regulations.gov

- Enter the following docket number into the “Search” box:
NOAA-NMFS-2012-0149.
- Select the appropriate title, and click “Submit a Comment.” This will display the comment Web form.
- Attachments to electronic comments (up to 10 MB) will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

Mail: Steve Branstetter, NOAA Fisheries,
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All comments will be part of the public record, and generally posted for public viewing to www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter, may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. Anonymous comments will be accepted.

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